(e) whether any agreement has been reached; and

(f) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Government maintains regular contact with Sri Lanka through diplomatic channels for securing the early release and repatriation of Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan custody.

(b) No. As on April 9,2003 thirty Indian fishermen are in custody with Sri Lanka authorities.

(c) Pakistan apprehended thirty-two Indian fishermen on March 6, 2003.

(d) For Sri Lanka: Both side agree that these cases should be dealt with in a spirit of compassion and understanding, in accordance with established legal procedures and in a humane manner. Government has suggested to the Sri Lankan Government that licensed fishing in their northeastern waters be permitted.

For Pakistan: Government announced on July 4, 2001 that Indian Coast Guard would not apprehend Pakistani fishermen who inadvertently transgress into our water and they would be turned back after due warning. Pakistan failed to reciprocate the gesture.

(e) and (f) Nil.

Passport racket in Delhi

3633. SHRI SUKHBIR SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have unearthed a Passport racket in Delhi recently;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the number of persons arrested in this connection and the action taken by the Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL - AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Yes.

(b) and (c) Delhi Police is investigating a case regarding fraudulent issuance of Indian Passports to nine Afghan nationals. Two passport

officials were detained and later released. Both officials have been suspended by the Ministry. Five other persons were also detained in the case.

Cultural Centres

3634. SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of proposals received for setting up of the cultural centres from the Indian Missions and Posts abroad and how many of those have been accepted;

(b) the number of the cultural centres set up during the last two years;

(c) whether the cultural centres in Washington has started functioning; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) 27 proposals for the setting up of new cultural centres have been received. These centres will be opened depending upon an assessment of their importance and the availability of funds. Presently, proposals for centres in Washington D.C. (USA), Suva (Fiji) and Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) are under consideration.

(b) One centre has been established at Dushanbe (Tajikistan) in December 2002 with the deputation of two teachers.

(c) No.

(d) An appropriate property for the centre is presently being identified for the purpose. Administrative and financial approvals are also being processed.

Projects in Bhutan funded by India

3635. SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of the mega projects in Bhutan which are being funded by Government along with the expenditure incurred on each project; and